

seen the spirit of service and compassion renewed in our country. We've all seen our Nation unite in common purpose when it mattered most.

We will need all these qualities for the work ahead. We have a war to win, and the world is counting on us to lead the cause of freedom and peace. We have a duty to spread opportunity and hope through every corner of this country. This is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it. And we know that for our country, the best days lie ahead.

May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:08 p.m. at the Washington Hilton.

Remarks in a Discussion on Job Training in Huntington, West Virginia

April 2, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming. Please be seated. I wish Dan had said "a friend of long standing"—[laughter]—as opposed to "an old friend." I knew him when he lived in Texas. You've got a good one running Marshall University here. He's a fine fellow. He's doing a fine job.

I'm proud to be back in Huntington. We're going to have an interesting discussion today about how to make sure people have an opportunity to get the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. That's really what we're here to talk about. We're going to talk about how to make sure everybody's life is optimistic and hopeful as this economy of ours grows and changes. A perfect place to do so here is at this community college, and I'm so honored to have been invited. Thank you for opening up your fantastic facility, and thank you for giving me a chance to come and talk.

By the way, right as I walked in—I want to thank the sisters. One of them said to me—probably the most important thing a President can hear is, she said, "Mr. President, I'm praying for you." Thank you.

I want to thank the State and local officials who are here. Thanks for coming by to say hello. I think that when you finish hearing this discussion, you're going to realize what

an important asset you have in the community college system of West Virginia and how the Federal Government and employers can work together with the community colleges to make sure people get the skills necessary to take advantage of an expanding job base.

I met a lady coming in named Robin Black. She was out there at the airport. The reason I mention Robin is, a lot of times people say the strength of America is our military. And that's a part of our strength, and by the way, it is strong, and we intend to keep it strong. Or they say the strength of America is the fact that we're a wealthy nation. And that's important as well. But the true strength of the Nation is the hearts and souls of our citizens. That's the true strength of America. And the reason I mention Robin Black is that she's a volunteer. Robin's sitting right there, by the way. She's a volunteer to help people going for a job interview to look as good as they possibly can, to understand what to say. She's a mentor to people who need help.

No, the strength of this country is the fact that we've got citizens from all walks of life who are willing to love a neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves, who are willing to work to change America one heart and one soul at a time. If you're one of those soldiers in the army of compassion, I thank you for doing what you're doing. You're making a difference to our country—just like you are, Robin. Thank you.

I'm an optimist, because I fully understand America's strengths and I've seen what we've come through. I want to remind you right quick what has happened to this country, what our economy has been through, what the America people have had to endure over the last 3 years.

We went through a recession. That means things were going backwards. That means three quarters of negative growth. Now, if you're a small-business owner, it's difficult to survive in a recession. If you're somebody looking for a job, it's hard to find a job during a recession. But we acted, and we cut the taxes on the people, which made the recession one of the shallowest recessions in economic history.

And then as we were recovering from the recession, the enemy hit us. They attacked us, and it affected us. It affected our way

of thinking, for starters. See, when most of us were growing up, we thought oceans could protect us, and we found out that wasn't the case. We found out that America could be harmed by people who hate what we stand for. We suffered for those who lost life. I vowed then and there that the best way to protect America was to get on the offense and stay on the offense and bring people to justice. We resolved as a nation not to allow terrorists to cause us to lose our optimism and our spirit. That's what we resolved. And we still have that spirit and resolve, by the way.

And then we found out we had some corporate citizens who didn't tell the truth. That affected our economy. It kind of shattered our idealism about people in positions of responsibility. We passed tough laws, by the way. We're not going to tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America. There will be consequences if you lie to your shareholders and your employees. But it affected us. It was a hurdle we had to cross. It was a challenge to our economy.

And then, as you know, I made the decision to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Let me tell you one of the important lessons of September the 11th, and it's important for people to understand, is that when we see a threat, we cannot let it materialize. That's an important lesson. I saw a threat. I looked at intelligence and saw a threat. The United States Congress looked at the same intelligence, and it saw a threat. The United Nations Security Council looked at the intelligence, and it saw a threat. People were worried about Saddam Hussein because of his past behavior. Remember, he had used weapons of mass destruction against his neighbors and his own people. I remembered the lesson of September the 11th as I looked at the data. I had a choice, either to trust a madman or defend the country. Given that choice, I'll defend America every time.

We've still got hard work in Iraq. The reason we do is, there's killers there who want to shake our will. They want the American people to forget what it means to promote freedom. They want us to retreat. See, a free Iraq is an historic opportunity. A free Iraq will change a neighborhood that needs to be free. A free Iraq will make the world more

peaceful. But a free Iraq is something that the terrorists fear. They hate freedom. They can't stand the thought of a free society, so they're willing to kill. And they're trying to shake our will, but they don't understand this country. We will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins. This country will stay the course and get the job done. We will get the job done.

Laura reminded me one time, she said, "Do you remember what it was like in the summer of 2002 when you turned on your TV sets and saw 'March to War'?" That's a hurdle that we had to overcome. You see, it's not good for the economy to be marching to war. It's good for our security, but it's hard for people to make investment decisions if you think you're marching to war. It's a negative thought. So that was the fourth challenge we faced here in America.

We faced a recession, an attack, corporate scandals, and a march to war to make us more secure. But we've overcome all those challenges, because the entrepreneurial spirit is strong, because the America people are great workers, and because of good policy.

One of the things I think really did help, and I look forward to continuing this dialog on the subject, is, you see, when a person has more money in their pocket, they're more likely to demand an additional good or a service. And when they demand additional good or a service, somebody's likely to provide the good or a service. And when somebody provides a good or a service, somebody is more likely to keep a job or find work.

The tax relief we passed is working. It's making a difference for this economy. And the reason I say that is, for example, the homeownership rate is the highest ever. That's really important. We want people owning their own home. It's a vital part of our economy.

Small businesses—the spirit of the small-business owner is strong in America. Remember, when you cut income-tax rates on individuals, you're really affecting most small businesses in America, because most small businesses are sole proprietorships or Subchapter S corporations, which means they pay tax at the individual income-tax rate. And in that most new jobs are created by small businesses, it makes sense to have a vibrant

small-business sector in America. And the small-business sector of this country is strong, and it's growing, and people are more optimistic about expanding their businesses.

Manufacturing is up. An important statistic besides the growth statistics is the fact that after-tax income is up by 10 percent since late 2000. That's good. If you've got more money in your pocket, that's a good thing.

The economy is growing, and people are finding work. Today the statistics show that we added 308,000 jobs for the month of March. We've added 759,000 jobs since August. This economy is strong; it is getting stronger. You can understand why I'm optimistic when I cite these statistics because I remember what we have been through. I mean, we're getting better, and that's important.

There are other things we need to do. We need to make sure the tax cuts are permanent. Congress doesn't need to be taking away the child credit or the marriage penalty or the 10-percent—or the reduction—or the increase of those eligible for the 10-percent bracket. We need to make these tax cuts permanent. Small-business owners need to have certainty in the Tax Code if they're going to be confident about expanding their businesses.

We need tort reform in America, if you're a small-business owner. If we want our jobs to stay here in America and want people to be able to find work, we better make sure the legal environment is fair and balanced. Frivolous lawsuits hurt small-business owners. They make it hard for people to expand their business.

We need less regulation. I wish I could tell you that every single piece of paper you fill out is read at the Federal level. *[Laughter]* I can't. *[Laughter]* If I were to say it is true, a lot of people would walk right out of the hall. *[Laughter]*

We need to make sure that we've got good policies to help control the cost of health care: medical savings accounts; association health care plans; and real, substantial medical liability reform at the Federal level.

West Virginia's unemployment rate is 5.4 percent, down from 6.4 percent a year ago. The policies are working. There's more we need to do. There's more we need to do to

make sure the job base here is strong and people can find good jobs right here in America. We need an energy policy that makes sense.

If you're a small manufacturing company—or big, for that matter—manufacturing company, and you're worried about where you're going to get your electricity from, it's hard to expand your business. It's hard to expand your business if you're worried about the reliability of electricity, not just the cost but whether or not electricity is going to be reliable. Our electricity system is antiquated. It wasn't all that long ago, last summer, to be exact, that we started having rolling blackouts. That affects the ability for people to find a job when that happens.

We've got a great, abundant resource in coal, and we need to—*[applause]*. I came to West Virginia a while ago when I was seeking the vote. I said, "We're going to have a robust, clean coal technology program funded by the Federal Government." My budget for this year has got \$447 million in it for clean coal technology. This Nation must be willing to use—we must be willing to use the resources we have in a smart way. We put out good regulations for mining companies to make sure we don't shut down the ability to find coal and, by the way, to hurt people finding work. In other words, we've been responsible, and the most responsible position is to make us less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

The job base is expanding. We've got a good strategy to keep expanding. But you've got to remember that as the economy changes, people need to change with it. Their skill levels need to change. And one of the big challenges we have is how to make sure we match people who want to work with the jobs which are available, and that's what we're going to discuss today.

This is—as I say, this is a time of transition. That's what the economists say. That's okay to use that word. The problem is, if you're one of the people that are worried about the transition, we need to make sure there's a plan to help you. That's what we need to do. We need to stand with people who want to work and help them gain the skills necessary so that they can do what they want to do, which is to put food on the table for

their families, to do their jobs as a responsible adult.

By the way, all job training starts with making sure we get it right at the elementary and secondary school level. The No Child Left Behind Act is really important. It's an important part of making sure that people can read and write and add and subtract. And we're going to stay on it by insisting that in return for Federal money, that we achieve high standards. See, I believe every child can learn, and I'm against these systems that just move these kids through and hope that they learn. We've got a—we'll say, "Show us whether or not a child is learning to read and write and add and subtract early in life." And if not, there will be the help necessary to make sure not one single child gets left behind. If you talk to the educators, they'll tell you, if we can get it right at the elementary and secondary school level, we'll be able to get it right at higher education as well.

Now, the other thing we need to do is recognize that some kids have been shuffled through and they need remedial help at the high school level. And we've laid out a good strategy to deal with that.

But I think one of the most exciting strategies is the one I started to detail in the State of the Union and will continue talking about next week, which is to make sure the WIA Program, the Workforce Investment Act, gets money into the classrooms, gets money to the people so that they can get properly trained for the jobs which exist.

The community college system is an incredibly important part of the education system in America because the curriculum are flexible. That means that if an employer group says, "We need these kind of people," that they're willing to adapt a curriculum to help train people for the jobs which exist. Vicki Riley is going to tell us what that means here in a second.

It's important for us to make sure there's collaboration, for example, for high-tech industries, so people get the skills. Listen, technology is changing, and it races through our economy, but work skills don't change as quickly. And that's the challenge we face. We've got to make sure we get people trained, and that's what we're here to talk about.

I want people out there listening to listen to the story of some of the people who have gone back to school, to realize that that option is available for you. If you're worried about the job you're in and you feel like you need a new skillset in order to meet the new jobs, there's some opportunity for you. There's Pell grants available. There's scholarship money available. Now, Government can't make you make up your mind to seek new skills, but we darn sure can help, and that's what we're here to talk about today.

And a perfect person to start the conversation is Vicki Riley. She's the provost and CEO of Marshall Community College. She has put in some very innovative programs. And Vicki, thank you for giving me a chance to visit this beautiful campus.

[Vicki Riley made brief remarks.]

The President. I think what Vicki is saying is, is that there are some fields that are begging for—looking for workers, best way to put it. The health care field is such a field. I mean, I have traveled this country quite extensively, and a lot of times I hear that, "Gosh, if we only had more skilled nurses, or if we only had more skilled technicians, we could meet the demands, our needs." And what Vicki is saying is, the community college here has got a curriculum developed to meet the needs of the health industry here in West Virginia. And I presume part of the curriculum was developed by the people doing the hiring.

Ms. Riley. Absolutely. One of the things, again, that is a strength of community college is we're connected. We're connected to business and industry. And those employers sit on our advisory boards, and they tell us what needs to be current. They tell us what they need. They tell us what we may be missing, and we go back and fix it, so that they're getting the types of employees they want to hire that next go-round.

The President. Yes, you see, that's an interesting concept, isn't it, and it's something people have got to understand, that Vicki goes out and says, "Who are you looking for? What kind of skills do you need? What can we do to adapt our curriculum to your needs?" And that's very important. It's that

flexibility which I think makes the community college system such a vibrant part of the American experience.

That's why I've asked Congress to put up an additional \$250 million for collaborative efforts between the community college and the local employer groups, so people can find the skills. I mean, after all, it makes sense for Government to help people help themselves. And that's what we're talking about here.

The other thing we can do to make sure Vicki's job is better is to make sure the paperwork requirements from the Federal Government are more streamlined. I mean, they've got all kinds of programs coming out of—am I right? *[Applause]*

We have got a student with us named Rina Angus. Now, Rina, first of all, what were you doing before you became a student?

Rina Angus. I was in administrative management at a local health club in Huntington. And whenever the facility was coming under new ownership, I decided that that was my time to leave.

The President. So you made the decision, right?

Ms. Angus. I made a decision.

The President. That's good. *[Laughter]* You're a mom?

Ms. Angus. Yes, sir.

The President. Two children?

Ms. Angus. Yes, sir.

The President. How old?

Ms. Angus. Eleven and thirteen.

The President. Whew, yeah, I've been there. *[Laughter]* You have a job, you decide to leave because of the change in the business, and then what happens?

Ms. Angus. My husband got laid off.

The President. Yes? Then what happens? So far it's not a very pretty story.

Ms. Angus. Well, we prayed a lot, and we found out through the Parkersburg Job Service that there was additional training available, that we qualified for a program called the Displaced Worker Program. And when we went for the initial training and interviews, it just happened that my husband lucked into another job and I qualified for the program. So they showed me a list of skills that were needed in the area, the in-demand jobs, and I saw one on there that

I had thought about when I was in high school and decided to pursue it.

The President. And what is it?

Ms. Angus. Radiologic technology in the allied health field here at Marshall.

The President. Fantastic. Catch the story. Listen to the story. I mean, I think it's a wonderful story about a mom and wife who, instead of getting, like, totally distraught with the circumstances, says, "I'm going to go back to school." And there's help for that. The Displaced Worker Program is part of the Federal monies that are available to help people go back to the community college system.

So, was it easy to go back to community college? Was it hard to go back to school?

Ms. Angus. Well, it was scary to go back after being out of school for 18 years. But with the help of Steve Brown, with the adult recruitment office here at Marshall—he made the transition very smooth. He told me the classes I needed to get into. He helped me sign up for them. He directed me where I needed to go. The staff at Marshall is wonderful. I mean, if you have situations arise with your children or an illness, they work with you to let you get your job done.

The President. Good. Do you think you're going to make more in your new job after having come here, or not? That's a loaded question. *[Laughter]*

Ms. Angus. Yes. I mean, the statistics show that I should double the salary that I was making before.

The President. Yes. Let me pick up on that. That's why the kind of leading question, as we say, and I'm not even a lawyer. *[Laughter]* It's important for people who are listening to realize that if you go back to the community college and gain new skills for the jobs which exist, not only can you become employable, you're likely to make more money.

I was at Mesa Community College and met a woman who had been a graphic design artist for 15 years. She decided to go back to school in a technological program, got out—the Government helped her—got out, and she made more in her first year in her new job because of the skills she had gained than she'd made in her 15th year as a graphic design artist.

You hear a lot of talk about becoming—productivity. That’s kind of the talk of the economists these days. That means that one worker can produce more units now than they could have before. But productivity also means having the skills necessary to work in the new jobs. And if you’re more productive, if the society is more productive, wealth goes up. And in this case, when Rina gets more productive, her personal wealth will go up.

Now, are you almost through?

Ms. Angus. I’m completing my first year here at Marshall, the basic skills program. And I’m currently awaiting an interview at Saint Mary’s School of Radiology, where, if I’m accepted, I would start this summer and complete 2 years of clinical and classroom training. And at that time, you take a board certification to become a certified radiologist—

The President. Do you need a recommendation? [*Laughter*]

Ms. Angus. Well, if you’re willing to give one.

The President. Okay, you got one.

Ms. Angus. Thank you very much, sir.

The President. Thanks. Great job.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. Rocky McCoy is with us. Rocky, tell us what you do. He’s got a very interesting job and a great opportunity to help people.

[*Rocky McCoy, site coordinator, Huntington Work4WV Career Center, and manager, Huntington Job Service, made brief remarks.*]

The President. That’s good. Now, tell me about your board. Do you have employers on your board?

Mr. McCoy. Yes, we do. Yes, we do.

The President. Like, how many? [*Laughter*] Well, not exactly.

Mr. McCoy. Our board is made up of—it’s a pretty large board. There’s probably 50-plus, and we’re required to have 51 percent of the membership from the private sector.

The President. Right, that’s good.

Mr. McCoy. So we have—we have several employers that are on our board.

The President. How many people do you see, would you say?

Mr. McCoy. In the Huntington office, I’d say we see anywhere from 400 to 600 people come through our door a month for one-stop services. It’s not necessarily job service; that is for all one-stop services and all of our partners within our one-stop system.

The President. Right. What else could people do at the one-stop?

Mr. McCoy. We have the job service, if someone’s looking for a job. We can go through the necessary paperwork, so to speak, to find out what a person’s skills are, and we can refer them out to jobs that are available. We also have the veterans program so—

The President. Right.

Mr. McCoy. —if we have any veterans that need special programs for veterans, they can talk to a veterans officer there. People with disabilities—we also have the Department of Rehabilitative Services there; the Department of Health and Human Resources, if people need some support until they find a job; senior employment programs; adult basic education, if a person needs to work on their GED; and also the basic skills program, such as remediation, job-seeking skills, interviewing skills, how to fill out a resume and job application.

The President. See, these services, by the way, used to be scattered all over. And now he calls it one-stop because you go to one place, and I appreciate that. Who’s hiring?

Mr. McCoy. Folks in the health industry, folks in the IT industry, and there are several smaller businesses that are hiring in the area.

The President. That’s good. See, there are jobs. And a lot of people say, “I hear there’s jobs available, but I don’t have the skills, so I’m not going to go look.” And Rocky’s job and, truth of the matter, all our jobs, is to say, “Here’s someone available to help you.” And you’ve got to want to help yourself, like this good lady did. You got to say, “I want to embetter myself. I want to take advantage of the opportunity.” But Rocky’s job is to help steer people to the opportunities, whether it be the community college or the jobs which exist, if people don’t feel like they need to enhance their skills.

And I appreciate you, Rock. I call you Rock.

Mr. McCoy. That's fine. *[Laughter]* You can call me whatever you want. *[Laughter]*

The President. All right, Sally Oxley is with us. Sally is a small-business owner. I love to be with entrepreneurs, people who are willing to start their own business and dream big dreams, people who—and as a result, by the way, of dreaming a dream, gets in a position, when successful, to hire people. That's one of the dividends of the entrepreneurial spirit, is people can find work.

Sally, tell us about your business. How did you get started? Why did you start your own business? How did you find the courage to start your business? And anything else you want to say.

[Sally Oxley, owner, Huntington Physical Therapy, made brief remarks.]

The President. By the way, that's not easy. It sounds easy; it's hard. It requires a good plan, a good strategy, and the development of a product people need.

Ms. Oxley. And the reason that I started my own business was, I wanted to do it my way. I wanted to do it the right way. And that seemed to be what evolved.

The President. Good. And are you looking for people?

Ms. Oxley. We are. We're always looking for good people.

[Ms. Oxley made further remarks.]

The President. And how is your business doing?

Ms. Oxley. It's growing. We're doing well.

The President. A lot of old guys like me with kind of aches and pains. *[Laughter]*

Ms. Oxley. A few. Birth to death, is what we say.

The President. I like that beginning part. *[Laughter]*

[Ms. Oxley made further remarks.]

The President. I'm glad you're doing well. Thanks for starting your own business. Thanks for putting people to work. I think it's a very interesting story, isn't it, that a small business in the health field connects with the community college in order to do two things, one, lay out the requirements necessary to hire people, but also provide a opportunity for on-the-job training.

I appreciate your contribution to the community. It's a great story.

Ms. Oxley. It's a great community.

The President. It is a great community. Thanks for coming.

Bryan Johnson.

Mr. Johnson. Yes, sir.

The President. I'm glad you're here.

Mr. Johnson. Glad to be here, sir.

The President. They ever call you "Red"? *[Laughter]*

Mr. Johnson. On several occasions. I haven't figured out why just yet. *[Laughter]*

The President. I'll be the funny guy. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Johnson. If we're going to do the act then, sir, I'll sit over there on your lap—

The President. That's right. *[Laughter]* Whew! Anyway, Bryan, changing subjects rapidly—*[laughter]*—no longer verbally dueling with Bryan. *[Laughter]* He is the chief information officer of Mountain State Center for Independent Living. Tell us your story, please sir.

[Mr. Johnson made brief remarks.]

The President. What did you get? What degree did you get here at Marshall?

Mr. Johnson. I got the IT degree. And they actually offer—

The President. Explain what IT means, just in case somebody—

Mr. Johnson. Yes, information technology, which basically covers computers and networking and whatnot.

The President. Now, that sounds like a pretty big leap, from a guy in a restaurant business to the IT business. Was it a big leap?

Mr. Johnson. You better believe it. When I started in 1998 into the program, I couldn't even tell you how to turn a computer on, okay? Now I'm a network engineer.

The President. That's good.

Mr. Johnson. Thank you. Thank you.

The President. By the way, did you have to pay for the—how did you handle the cost?

Mr. Johnson. I got student loans, and I also received some assistance through WIA as well.

The President. Right, Workforce Investment Act. A lot of times, with Government things, we talk in initials.

[Mr. Johnson made further remarks.]

The President. And so what is your—with the degree you have, not only do you provide a—you're an important employee for the firm for which you work, you're also now a consultant.

[Mr. Johnson made further remarks.]

The President. Are you making more money now than in the restaurant business?

Mr. Johnson. Oh, yes.

The President. That's really important for people to understand, that if you come back to Marshall Community College, for example, and get new skills—how long did it take you to get them?

Mr. Johnson. Well, sir, it actually took me 4 years with this program, because there are four specializations on the degree, and I went for all four because of portability. I wanted to be able to go anywhere and do anything.

The President. So you went for the full monty.

Mr. Johnson. Oh, yes. Indeed. [Laughter]

The President. Most programs don't take 4 years, I don't think.

[The discussion continued.]

The President. It's very important for people to understand that, one, the job base is growing in different sectors. You know, I know workers are worried that—you know, "I wish my son or my daughter could have worked in the same industry I've worked in for all my life." But this is a changing economy. It's a different economy. It's an economy that provides great opportunity. However, people are going to have to seize the moment, and that's what we're here discussing. We're discussing this sense of providing—so that people can provide for their families.

And there's two great examples here of people that could have decided, "Well, I don't think I'm going to improve myself," and just stayed doing what they were doing. But instead, I sense a great deal of excitement in their voices about having made a decision that was an important decision, a decision that probably seemed pretty darn hard at first. But now that you've made it and you're in the middle of it, you can recommend it, I suspect.

I love being with an entrepreneur, a job creator, a compassionate soul who is interested in expanding the workforce in a smart way. I want to thank the local government providing for the one-stops. Appreciate you running it, Rocky—or Rock. [Laughter]

And finally, I'm so honored to have been here at this community college. Madam President, thanks for opening it up. Thank you for doing what you're doing. Thank you for providing hope for people, providing an opportunity for people to take advantage of this exciting era in which we live.

Finally, I want to conclude by telling you that I talked about the challenges that faced our country. We'll have other challenges too. There's no doubt in my mind, this great country will overcome any challenge put in its path, because this country is great because of the people of this country.

Thanks for coming. God bless, and God bless our great land. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 a.m. at Marshall Community and Technical College. In his remarks, he referred to Dan Angel, president, Marshall University.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

March 27

In the morning, at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, the President had an intelligence briefing.

March 29

In the morning, the President returned to Washington, DC. While en route aboard Air Force One, he had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, the President met with Secretary of State Colin L. Powell.